The Monster and the Darkness

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Summary

Another murder. Another body displayed with the precision and whimsy of lovingly created art. Death elevated to transcendence. Only this time, all the jagged edged pieces that have been gathering in the back of Will's mind slot into place, meshing together seamlessly. With the revelation of the Ripper's identity, Will finds himself in the forest of his own mind where he must confront the other half of himself. Can he accept the Darkness inside of him? Can he accept his Monster?

Notes

I love the idea of the war that is already going on inside of Will as he struggles with his innate darkness. I think that struggle was going on long before Hannibal arrives in Will's life. Not that Hannibal didn't feed and nurture it with full intentions of bringing it out to play.

Also, if you are interested, this is what I imagined Will hearing in his head and what I listened to for a large portion of the time I wrote this:

Sonatas of Dietrich Buxtehude

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ms61jYEBVU

See the end of the work for more notes

The Monster and the Darkness

Will watched motes of dust float through beams of stage lights that were seeing use for the first time in over a decade. Until recently, the abandoned studio where the latest atrocity had been discovered had been under reign to god knows how many generations of spiders, as evidenced by thick cobwebs hanging from every visible surface.

Well, almost every surface.

The area where the body of the newscaster was displayed had been completely cleared of debris. It seemed while the killer had no problem being elbow deep in blood, he was extremely fastidious about dirt and grime. Will knew he wouldn't want to work in the filth, just as he would refuse to leave his masterpiece behind in it either.

Even without tapping into his 'gift' Will knew the location was chosen for a purpose. The derelict studio was a time capsule to technology of times past. An ancient tomb of television magic that had been preserved by the mere chance of being forgotten. Will would bet his right arm the location was where their newscaster got his humble start.

He pressed his fingers firmly to the nerves on the underside of his brows, willing the building migraine to relent with little success. Someone pressed a cup of hot coffee into his hand and he mumbled a 'thank you' without bothering to look. It wouldn't have mattered anyway, they were already walking away from him.

Most everyone had realized that Will needed space to work his magic, and even if he didn't, his mannerisms didn't invite the kind of camaraderie most of the other agents shared. That was just as well to him; working through his own emotions was difficult enough without the added strain of slipping in and out of the minds of serial killers and their victims, let alone trying to make small talk while avoiding the emotions of 'normal' people.

Will was starting to feel like he spent more time as a killer than anything else anymore; always teetering over the chasm of darkness that called to him, promising an eternal freefall into madness.

Lately, more and more often, when Will awoke from blood fueled dreams in which a version of himself he both admired and abhorred walked free, he wondered how much longer he could keep his balance on the edge of the bottomless chasm. Sometimes he wondered if it would be easier to jump in instead of waiting for the impending fall.

He took a few sips of the still too hot coffee, relishing the slight burn of the offering before setting it aside to take a closer look at the scene before him.

With Jack breathing down his neck and spectacularly displayed corpses piling up, it seemed there was no time like the present to push the boundaries of madness a little bit more. Wondering if this would be the last time he would have defenses to be lowered, no matter how meager, he dropped the forts in the bone arena of his skull and stepped into the darkness.

The pendulum swings, each pass stripping a fine layer of morality and self, allowing Will to fully step into the mind that orchestrated the scene before him. When he opens his eyes, the horror that any rational person would feel with the view is gone.

This was a work of art, something that was done with reverence and care. The work was more than death or murder, it elevated such things beyond the veil of mortal vision. Here, a master had taken something base and ugly and created something of ethereal beauty.

The artist would have started by cleaning his workspace, making it a place he could create his sculpture. Will's eyes found a chair just beyond the ring of dust, the clean seat pointing to its use. It wouldn't have been sat in, not by his artist, but something had sat there, a silent witness to the proceedings. No. Not silent. His sculptor would have wanted proper ambiance in which to relax as he preformed.

Will closed his eyes and classical music filtered through his mind. Mozart? Bach? No, those would be too mainstream for this artist. Something more obscure…

The music began to take form, an elegant voice singing in a language the artist would understand even if Will could not. Nothing so well know as piano featured in the assembly. Horns and voices, no minor chords or dark tones to this melody, it would be uplifting and beautiful, something to reflect the positive mood within which his artist would want to work. From somewhere deep in a corner of his mind a name came to him, *Dietrich Buxtehude*.

Yes, somehow that was perfect. Will knew that would be more to his liking. After all, their killer was elegant and refined, nothing so gauche as a heavy and downtrodden symphony to plant dark tones in his work.

With the strains of a somehow familiar symphony unwinding in his mind Will studied the careful positioning of the body before him: The man was set back on his haunches, hands and fingers interlocked in front of him, head tilted back to look straight into a camera that was focused on the corpse' face. Will gave a tiny smile at the nod to the man's profession; his life spent performing in front of one just as his death.

The victim was a male in his early forties. The way he was hung from the bars overhead that were meant for stage lighting suggested that he was now a light himself. A tool used to illuminate.

Lengths of cable had been used to suspend him. One of them had a microphone still attached to its length.

Will tapped it with a gloved finger, setting it swaying gently. The empath cocked his head as he observed it dangling in space. The corner of Will's mouth twitched minutely as he joined in on another homage to the man‘s profession. The killer was feeling playful and he was allowing Will in on the joke. Still, there was more there, a nod to something that had led to

the man being chosen for death. An offence given either directly or to something that had been held in high regard of the killer.

Will moved closer, walking inside the clean circle, standing in perusal just as the killer had done. Everything had its place. Nothing was chance in this little ring of illumination; just as each musician had their notes to play, each cord and slice and missing organ stood for the greater image.

The man was well dressed; his hair styled with perfection and his suit meticulously clean.

Or it had been before his heart had been cut from his chest.

Even with the surgical precision of the incisions, it would be impossible to keep all of the resulting viscera from touching the tailored fabric. Will saw hands moving with great care; surgeon's hands styling the deceased's hair with as much skill as he used to clamp the arteries and slice out the heart. Hands full of enough strength to break bone and separate sinew. Hands steady enough to cut through arteries without leaving them a mangled mess. Hands capable of a delicate enough touch to call forth pleasure or death as they willed.

Those hands belonged to someone with vast intelligence. And near endless amounts of control. Someone who had a place in society and the world. Someone whose madness was only allowed out when it was safe. Someone Will found himself envying.

His artist had spent the night covered in death and blood, much the same as Will almost always did nowadays. Unlike Will, he had surely slept soundly afterward. Most likely better than usual.

Will studied the man on his knees, and thought about the skilled hands that had put him there. Somehow this scene was different in tone. Will felt the distinct impression that this was done in an attempt to curry favor. Of whom, Will wasn't sure, but he found his mind wandering to a shadow of those elegant hands. He wondered how those hands might feel if they were turned towards more tender pursuits.

He could almost see it, the precision with which they would move in day to day tasks; the care their owner would take with things that were precious to him. The swift punishment that would be doled out to those who were foolish enough to threaten him or the things that he loved. Will could see those wonderful fingers taking form, reaching for him, and he wondered what fate would be meted out when they finally met his skin. Would pleasure or death be his due? Music crested teasingly across his brain as the owner of those hands began to slip into the light of his mind's eye…

"Someone copying the angel killer?" Jack's voice jolted into his reverie.

Some of the music stuttered - a missed note, a violin shrilling off key - as Will was jilted rudely from the melody in his head by the impatient agent. Without Will's defenses in place, it was easy to feel the energy pouring off of the impatient man: Will wasn't working fast enough, he wasn't performing like Jack wanted.

It was rude to interrupt someone while their walls were down.

The building image of those clever hands had also been blasted away by the interruption. Will shared a private moment of understanding with the killer as answered a terse negative to the hovering Jack. Once the older man realized that was all Will was going to offer, he moved away and Will sank back into the soothing chords in his head.

Will knelt to look more closely at the dead man, studiously avoiding the eyes for the moment. Even in death eye contact could sometimes overwhelm him and he wasn‘t ready to switch perspectives just yet.

Somehow, he felt comfort in the mind of this artist, at the vast amount of control, and even the slight touch of whimsy evident. Will had the distinct feeling if he met the killer, he would like them, perhaps even find them someone he could lean on. He tried not to think on that too much, instead turning his focus on the skin of the victims face. He arched a brow at the unnatural tan that still graced the complexion even in death.

This close to the victim Will could easily see the face was covered in tiny cuts, each one little more than a nick from a razor. Or more accurately, a scalpel. Though the wounds were tiny, the vast amount of them was something that would prove quite serious, if the man were alive. The myriad of slices were as meticulously cleaned as the hair and suit had been, except for the ones at each of the four corners of the eyes. Instead of the other shallow and sterile wounds, the fine slices there had allowed rivulets of blood to run down from the eyes in tracks of tears. Up close, the man’s face appeared to have been nearly butchered from the fine slices, but as Will shifted slightly back, the effect was immediately obvious. With infinite care the face had been sculpted to reveal a particular expression.

“He’s not praying, he’s begging.” Will spoke to no one in particular, but Jack answered almost immediately.

“For what? Mercy?”

“No,” Will said as he wondered, not for the first time, how people could be so blind to the obvious, “For forgiveness.”

“Forgiveness for what?”

Will shrugged noncommittally as he moved around to look at the camera screen that was focused on the victim. This would afford him the view which the artist would want. Just as the man’s painstakingly orchestrated profession had been seen through the lens of a camera, so was his death meant to be seen.

So Will did as only Will could do; Will looked and he saw.

He saw a heartless, pompous and self important man who was now on his knees begging for forgiveness with tears running down his face. It should invoke pity, but instead it made Will sneer as he looked into the dead eyes.

And realized he knew who this man was.

Less than a week ago the newscaster had made some very disparaging remarks about Will on live television.

Will had only heard about the segment after the fact. Some news anchor doing a story on the ever elusive serial killer that had yet to be caught in spite of the 'expert' that had been brought in on the case. The man had belittled and accused Will without knowing a damn thing from the high horse of his newscaster's chair.

Now he was strung up in the abandoned and derelict studio of his past. The very place that Will realized had been the man's humble beginnings was now his tomb. There was a comical irony that Will couldn't deny; the newscaster would be making national headlines, if not in the way he desired.

Forgiveness for what indeed.

Few people would care to punish someone for giving such offense to William Graham. Revelation struck Will like the prongs of so many antlers. The ivory tips lifted him up to show him his gift, carefully wrapped in bone and blood.

A crescendo crested in his mind and he finally found the source that had supplied him with the name of his admirer's composer. It had accompanied a late dinner and a glass of wine.

He gave a brittle laugh as his world flipped on its head.

He should have known.

The knowledge - and the implications that came with it - sliced completely and without err into the part of his psyche that allowed him to walk the fragile tightrope of the minds and motivations of others.

Hannibal Lecter was the monster he had been hunting. As if that were not revelation enough, the hints of admiration and desire that littered each new victim spoke to Will specifically and with intimate intent. The lighthearted teasing said, *"Come and see, come and see. Look at what I have created for you. Come and look, and* ***see*** *as no one else is able."*

And Will did see. He had laughed along at the small jokes to which no one else had been privy. He had raised his lip in distaste at the chosen victims obvious failings. So well did he see that he had to go home and try to find out where his feelings and emotions began and where the monster's ended, with limited success. His very stronghold was now revealed to be his weakness.

Sometimes, when he was fighting to slice and rip what he knew he should feel from the grasp of what he did feel, he wondered just how much of it was really him. Were all the tendrils of satisfaction from each kill really insinuated upon him without his consent? Deep down, Will knew the answer.

The tableaus of each carefully constructed scene lapped over each other in his mind. Stacking and shrinking together before expanding out into a canvas of beauty and gore. Finally pieced together as they were meant to be seen, the works of art fanned out in his consciousness,

skirting to the edges of his comprehension like the vastness of stars in space during a moonless night. Out and out they expanded before they rocketed back to a single point, shattering and fracturing the tiny place that Will tried to keep separate from all the other psyches he took on in attempts to find killers.

Will was vaguely aware his body was shaking in uncontrollable spasms while the fragile globe of himself, hidden deep enough in his own mind that even he himself sometimes found difficult to reach again, fractured to bleed into the dark parts he had tried so hard to deny.

Somewhere Jack Crawford was calling his name with a sharp edge of concern in his voice. He was unaware of the flurry of activity around his person as he floated: hands he didn't feel pulling him away from contaminating the crime scene.

Freed from its prison, Will felt his new psyche sinking roots into the darkness of his mind made fertile with blood spilled with the intention of his seduction. Awareness of his body faded completely as he finally tipped over into the chasm of darkness on which he had been teetering.

Instead of the sharp plummet of freefall, Will found himself floating in the darkness of his subconscious. He floats spinning and swirling gently, sinking deeper than he has ever been to walk in the inky, blood drenched corners of his inner sanctum. As he descends, the blackness of the chasm gives way to a new landscape below. It fades into focus, a strange forest reaching as far as his eye can see.

A familiar apparition awaits, the Ravenstag looking up to him expectantly, its dark eyes following Will‘s decent. As if the attention of his companion gives Will weight and direction, his body stops its gentle meandering and his feet settle into rich soil.

His eyes track down to his pale, bare feet standing out in too bright relief though everything else is shades of dark and blood. With scarcely a thought for his nakedness, Will looks back up to fix on the stag waiting patiently for his attention. When it has it, it turns and begins to walk through the forest of pitch trees. Every piece of foliage, every twisting branch and edge of rippling bark glints and shines wetly, their leaves a myriad of bloody hues.

Will follows the Ravenstag, trailing behind as it leads him deeper through the forest.

As he walks, new trees spring up around him. They are white, like bone bleached in the sun, and their leaves sprout in bursts of colorful and delicate feathers. They twist and twine gently, stirred by an invisible breeze and Will wishes he could pluck them down to take with him; they would make beautiful lures.

The new trees burst forth into the forest as far as Will can see, taking up their places in between the trees of pitch and blood. As they rise from the soil, Will realizes that the forest now seems complete; as if the spaces in between the black and bloody trees were there, just waiting for the bone and feather trees to take their rightful places.

He feels an odd sense of comfort and welcome here. It's an alien sensation, something he can't remember feeling in the recesses of his own mind.

The Ravenstag changes direction, heading towards the only area that appears to be void of trees. As Will follows his guide up a gentle slope, he sees the reason for their absence; a lake, black as obsidian and smooth as glass takes up most of the clearing.

The stag never paused, walking straight into the lake and disappearing beneath its surface without a single ripple marking its passage.

Will pauses, unsure if he is meant to follow and after a brief moment of hesitation, he steps from the shore intending to follow his guide into the lake.

His feet settle solidly on the unyielding obsidian surface.

Curious, but not alarmed, Will steps back to wait for the stag's return.

He doesn't wait long.

As he watches, antlers begin to rise from the water to herald his guide's return. Something about them is different though, the water still doesn't ripple, but instead it clings as the antlers emerge, like candle wax when stacked atop itself on dipping fingers.

When a second pair of antlers breaks the surface, Will steps back in alarm. These antlers gather no evidence of passage from the strange lake as the first ones did.

With every inch of ascent the water of the lake gathers around the antlered figure riding the Ravenstag like tar, obscuring its features and hiding its form. Will steps away from the stag as it breaches the surface of the lake completely. Nothing of the lake clings to it, only its passenger drips heavy drops onto the ground as it dismounts and turns its back towards Will. As Will watches, the gelatinous blackness drips and dribbles down the new arrival's arms and legs.

It looks disconcertingly like the antlered humanoid is melting as the tar-like substance slithers off only to reveal skin that looks like it has been carved from marble the same color. The creature gives a little shake of its head, sending the last few clinging drops splattering from its antlers before turning to face Will.

Will startles and takes a step back as he looks into a perfect mimicry of his own face.

"Hello there. I was wondering when you'd show up."

It speaks to Will in his own voice, only different. There is a confidence and a slyness there in the tone that Will could hardly remember hearing from his own mouth.

"What are you?" Will asks as he takes a step closer, trying to see better.

The creature gives a small smirk and cants his head slightly, the move exaggerated by the magnified tilt of the antlers.

"You mean 'who'?"

“What?” Will asks again, confused.

“Who,” came the answer, the smirk amplifying with the repetition.

Will grasps his meaning and corrects his question.

“Who are you?”

The creature smiled at this, revealing white teeth, the only deviation from black on the creature other than its blood red eyes, which Will was studiously avoiding.

“Who do you think?”

Will didn’t answer, instead stepping slowly around as he swept his eyes over every familiar plane and curve. It was a perfect copy of himself, save for the arching and pointed antlers, done in shades of obsidian and smoke and blood. The creature stood still, tracking him with casual movements of its antlered head, the smirk never leaving its intimately familiar lips.

Those white teeth flashed in contrast to the pitch lips as Will circled back to face the creature. It waggled its eyebrows and asked, “Figure it out yet? I know you have. After all…” Here it paused waiting for Will to finish.

“You’re me, or at least a part of me.”

“Very good! And of course that means you’re me, or at least a part of me.”

At this statement, antlered Will clapped his hands and plopped down on the ground. The sudden movement caused Will to jump and his dark twin laughed at this.

“Good grief you’re a jumpy one. Of course, I already knew that.”

The Ravenstag moved closer to Will, sidling along behind him before it sank down to rest. Will followed suit, sitting with more reserve than his counterpart as he leaned against the solidity of the stag at his back. Somehow, it gave him comfort and security to snuggle into its feathered body. The great beast nuzzled at Will affectionately before laying its head down.

Antlered Will watched the exchange. “I think he likes you. Actually, I know he does. Have you realized what he is yet?”

Will looked at his mirror, who was sprawled out on the ground completely heedless of his naked state. But then, why should he be? Still, it was infinitely strange to watch such a copy of his own body move of its own accord.

“He’s a guide.”

“Come now, he’s much more than that. You aren’t even trying.”

Will thought back to the first time the stag had appeared to him in his dreams, before it had become an expected and comforting companion even in his waking hours. He thought back

to crows feasting on the antler impaled corpse of a young woman as if she were no more than carrion found on the side of the highway.

A terrible tragedy is what it should have seemed to Will, but instead he had called it ‘gift wrapped‘, a deliberate insight into the mind of the killer of young women they had been hunting. Now he knew that is what it had been, literally.

Even then Will had known that the monster they were hunting was a different one than the monster that had left him his present. Not that something hadn’t been taken for the monster himself - the girl had been missing a pair of perfectly good lungs.

Now Will knew those lungs had found their way into Hannibal’s immaculate kitchen.

He tried to feel disgust about that, but instead he could only feel an odd sort of budding sensation in his chest. Hannibal had been willing to kill someone just to help Will see what he had so desperately been trying to see at the time.

Even though doing so would bring him into the scope of Will’s vision, potentially putting Hannibal in the line of Will’s sights.

“He’s our connection, a manifestation of the pull between Hannibal and me.”

At this, Dark Will smiled, a genuine, gentle thing, before he answered in the most sincere tone Will had heard from him yet.

“Indeed. He’s our red string of fate, born out of blood and bone, and the very first overture of interest from our beloved Monster. Fitting, don’t you think?”

And it was fitting. Will thought back to his first meeting with Hannibal, where Will had become a bristling, biting thing as he realized that he was more the subject of interest than the killer on whom they had supposedly been collaborating. Defensive and displeased at Jack’s maneuvering, Will had done nothing to hide his displeasure at being found on the pointed end of someone else’s perception. But thinking back to the punctual arrival of a new corpse, laden with clues of juxtaposition, Will realize that as the wielder of such perception, Hannibal had not escaped unscathed. Indeed, the Monster had been extremely accurate that perception does cut both ways.

Will was not unfamiliar with people who had an interest in fields pertaining to the mind becoming interested in him. It was just that every psychiatrist or doctorate candidate that wanted to peer into his skull, or write a paper, or do a study, had done it with the attitude one uses on the contents of a particularly interesting Petri dish.

More rare were the times Will found himself perused with the intent of romantic interest. The few of those relationships that Will had embarked on had never managed to last very long. Eventually, they all ended when the person realized Will wasn’t going to change, that he wasn’t going to suddenly be able to offer them what they wanted or needed. They would realize they couldn’t ‘fix’ him, couldn’t fill in the empty spaces with their love or attention.

And they would realize that Will was truly broken when it came to the ability to create intimacy that was truly his and not borrowed from the bleed of their own emotional needs. It wasn't long before even the briefest glimpse of eye contact revealed doubt, anger, lies, disappointment - or the very worst - pity.

Never once had Will seen pity in Hannibal's eyes.

The man was nearly inscrutable, holding a mask so perfectly in place that even Will with all his empathy almost never saw the edges lift. Or so he had thought, but with the realization that Hannibal and the Ripper were one and the same Will realized that wasn't true. Not only had he seen behind the mask, but that mask had been removed willingly and completely. No one else had been afforded such a view of the monster beneath as Will had been.

Will still remembers telling Hannibal that he didn't find him very interesting upon their first meeting. A proof that his empathy was far from infallible.

"Very fitting. Instead of a bouquet I get a companion for my madness. A living likeness of my connection to a serial killer in the darkness of my own mind."

"He may not have bought us roses, but you can't say he hasn't wined and dined us. Of course, if we mention we want flowers, I have no doubt we'd wind up awash in the most elegant arrangements imaginable."

Will cast his attention back to his companion, noting the use of 'us' and understanding that it was entirely appropriate. He even offered a little smile of his own, imagining the lengths Hannibal would go for them if he were to mention a want for more traditional courting gifts.

He wondered what would await if he signaled his willingness. Exquisite candlelit dinners shared between only them, gifts wrapped in paper that was worth more than Will's entire wardrobe, soft touches chased with hot breath and gentle lips in front of a low burning fire.

"He would be good to us," Dark Will said, his tone earnest, and there was no doubt between them that this was true.

Will remembered the glimpse of hands he had almost seen before Jack had interrupted at the scene of Hannibal's latest gift.

Now, he was free to picture them and the strong arms they belonged to, the broad shoulders and well formed chest. Thighs that would have the strength to support Will's weight when he felt inclined to be held aloft.

And piercing Bordeaux tinted eyes watching him with the gaze of a predator and protector.

He wondered what would happen when he pried at the edge of the mask, demanding the attentions of Hannibal's carefully concealed monster.

Hands pinning him, holding him where they would to explore and torment. He could feel the hard press of forearms and chest as he was pressed down to receive pleasure whether he willed or no. The beat of long lean legs and thighs pushed to give chase in pursuit.

The flash of triumph in those blood tinted eyes as they cut off all options of escape.

Will heard a shivering moan and he wasn't sure if it had come from himself or his dark twin.

He knew it didn't matter as he looked across to the other version of himself.

One and the same, two halves of a whole, two sides of a coin. He moved towards his darkness. The antlered head nodded in agreement and whispered as Will crawled towards him.

"He sees us both. He wants us both.

Not like Jack, who glimpses me behind your eyes and wants to use me. He doesn't care what it costs you, he'll cast you aside once he's eroded any chance of our coexistence.

Not like Alana, who wishes that you could conquer me and bend me to your will so that you could be stable and good and normal.

Not like all the others who have fallen to their own darkness and want to bring you under my subjugation and let the madness and blood flow unbounded.

And not like us, who watch each other through our shared eyes, who dance along the edges of each others consciousness, rarely syncing, rarely touching with more than feverish brushes swept aside too quickly out of fear that we will be dominated by the other."

Will reached for his Darkness, linking fingers and standing together. They rest perfectly matching foreheads together, blue eyes searching red as they see each other fully for the first time.

"No longer," Will whispers, hearing the words from two mouths. "No longer will we fight amongst ourselves. I want to be the thing to fear in my dreams."

Black and light embraced, antlers ruffling gently through chocolate curls.

He felt it then, an aligning of his contradictions. An acceptance for all the things that made him undesirable and incomprehensible to others. How could he despise the darkness in his soul? How could he hate himself?

After all, this is as it always was, there is nothing new here except his own acceptance. Perhaps he only needed the reassurance that someone was out there who could accept him, all of him. Someone both tender and terrible. Someone whom Will was ready to accept as wholly as he had been accepted.

A new creature shakes off the carcass of the old and emerges into the world as Will Graham lets go of his fear.

For why should he fear? The Monster admired him, delighted in him, shared jokes with him. And under it all Will could now see desire, the attempts to woo.

The dark frissons of want that Will had felt for the Ripper certainly didn't seem so insane now. Neither did the longing he had felt for a certain psychiatrist seem so unethical or unwanted.

The Darkness in him longed for the Monster. And he knew just as the Darkness and the Monster were perfect, so were Will and Hannibal. Each of them were halves of wholes, together they would be quartered and matched perfectly.

Still, Will felt a small smile play about his lips as he thought back on events that had inexorably led him here. A first meeting where even his bristling and ability to see what others could not had attracted Hannibal's attention. He thought on what he now knew was his first gift, a body mounted in a field as a perversion of what Garret Jacob Hobbs' kills were.

He thought of the first meal they had shared; protein scramble and an attempt to form a connection beyond the professional. The first hint of the razor's edge scraping along the silken strands of Will's connections with others. The way Hannibal had called out the way Jack treated him, saw him as opposed to the way Hannibal did. A china teacup, fragile and ready to be filled up with the images of another killers mind. A mongoose, ready to grapple and subjugate a snake full of venom and death with its own innate and hidden strength and cunning.

Something obviously breakable as opposed to something deceptively brutal. Will had the potential to be either, but Hannibal had pushed and pulled, nurtured and deceived Will into his own ends. It was more than coincidence that Will found himself ready to accept his darker half, but he doubted even Hannibal would be expecting this metamorphosis so soon.

His Monster was a master of manipulation. Will could see it a surely as he could see the blood that had sprayed across his face and the lenses of his glasses when Garret Jacob Hobbs had slashed his own daughter's throat right in front of Will. He could still smell the copper in the air and feel the blood bubbling between his fingers as he had seen the shock and fear the young woman's eyes. Could still hear *"See, see?"* as the man died, unable or unwilling to flee in spite of the warning call he had received.

Will could still feel the grasp of strong and elegant fingers as his own were moved aside and replaced by Hannibal's to stem the flow of blood. A life saved and a new connection made for Will based on the desire of his Monster.

Always he was watching and waiting, making subtle nudges and connections between them.

The Monster and the man, both manipulators each.

Will walked to the edge of the lake, glancing down to see his own reflection. He looked the same, pale skin and messy curls, stubble on his jaw, and storm blue eyes.

And a set of beautifully arching and branching jet black antlers.

His stag moved beside him, having heaved itself up from the forest floor, and the two looked at their reflection in the lake. Will turned his eyes to see the feathered stag watching him expectantly, its black sheen mirroring the desires in his soul.

He could forgive his Monster's manipulation, but that didn't mean it would go without any acknowledgment or consequences.

He climbed onto the back of the Ravenstag, watching the inky waters part as they made their decent through the darkness.

When he resurfaced, Jack was kneeling beside him, supporting him with an arm behind his shoulders and neck. He was saying something, but Will only watched the stag as it turned and walked towards where Will's car was parked.

"Will! Will?," Jack's voice was bleeding through as Will shook his head and turned his attention back to his physical body.

He was asking Will something, it took him a moment to understand. He focused on the moving lips as his mind began to recover from its metamorphosis.

"Are you all right?"

Will blinked at him, cocking his head to the side slightly. And then he looked into Jack's eyes.

He dropped into the familiar ocean that was other people's feelings and desires, but he found he could tread the water more easily, able to keep his own head from sinking below the surface.

Jack was easier to read than he had ever been.

Concern. That Will had finally been pushed to the end of his usefulness. Desperation. That this killer would finally be his utter undoing. Anger. That Will wasn't giving him everything he needed. Guilt. That he was using Will and pushing him further than he should. Resolve. That he would push and push until Will slipped so far beneath the surface that there would be nothing left.

As long as Will got Jack what he wanted, he would use and use until Will was all used up.

Will shook off the arm supporting him and stood. He ignored Jack yelling at his back as he made his way to the stag waiting patiently beside his car. When Jack realized that his threats and entreaties weren't going to do any good, he demanded that if Will were leaving a crime scene, he had better go and see Dr. Lecter. He added that he would be calling him immediately.

Will didn't mind. It was time to pay his Monster a visit.

Will called over his shoulder as he closed the door to his car, "Tell him I'll let myself in."

End Notes

Hope you enjoyed! I figured Will would have a mind forest instead of a palace since every time we see it he seems to be in nature. The perfect setting for Will to meet a literal Dark Will. As always, your thoughts are appreciated!

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